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ADOPTION OF THE REPORT OF THE COMMISSION ON ITS THIRTY-NINTH SESSION

Draft report

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Chapter ____

PREPARATIONS FOR THE FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN: ACTION FOR EQUALITY, DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE

1. The Commission considered item 3 of its agenda at its ____ to ____ meetings, from 15 to 20 March 1995. It had before it the following documents:

(a) Report of the Secretary-General containing the revised draft of the Platform for Action (E/CN.6/1995/2);

(b) Report of the Secretary-General on the second review and appraisal of the implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women (E/CN.6/1995/3 and Add.1-10);

(c) Report of the Secretary-General on preparations for the Fourth World Conference on Women (E/CN.6/1995/4);

(d) Note by the Secretary-General transmitting the results of the regional conferences and other international conferences (E/CN.6/1995/5 and Add.1-7);

(e) Note by the Secretary-General transmitting a study on technical and financial cooperation programmes targeting women (E/CN.6/1995/6);

(f) Note by the Secretary-General transmitting the draft rules of procedure of the Conference (E/CN.6/1994/L.3);

(g) Report of the Secretary-General on the 1994 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development (A/49/378).

The report of the Secretary-General on the proposed merger of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (A/49/217-E/1994/103) was made available to the Commission.

2. In introducing the item, the Secretary-General of the Fourth World Conference on Women said that the success of the Conference would completely depend on the work done during the thirty-ninth session. The preparatory process at the international, regional and national levels was proceeding well and involved a large number of different activities that examined the key issues of the advancement of women, including significant mobilization of research and policy analysis. The 1994 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development and the second review and appraisal of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women formed the conceptual and factual basis for the Platform for Action. She emphasized that the Platform for Action should be built on the results achieved during the regional and United Nations conferences and should meet the needs of all women in the world.

3. In her statement, the Governor-General of Barbados and convener of the NGO Forum at the Nairobi Conference, stressed that women should demonstrate to the whole world a new form of policy-making based on dialogue. She emphasized the importance of cooperation among Governments and non-governmental organizations. The forthcoming NGO Forum would be historic in its level of participation and in the commitment of those involved. Referring to the Platform for Action, she urged that special attention be paid to the paramount issue of peace.

4. Many representatives emphasized that the Fourth World Conference on Women should promote a new vision of development based on women's reality and rights and should be implemented in the spirit of solidarity between women and men, between nations and between present and future generations.

5. It should be a "Conference of Commitments" and the outcome of the Conference should be as practical and focused as possible. Efforts should be made to ensure that adequate resources, processes and mechanisms were put in place for the accountability and implementation of that new vision. It was emphasized that at Beijing, besides trying to create equality between men and women in a given world, it would be necessary to question the situation of that world itself and examine the processes and systems that were simultaneously producing new patterns of poverty and wealth. In that context, the need for consolidation and building of new bases of solidarity for international women's movements and the creation of new partnerships with Governments and civil societies was stressed.

6. Many representatives said that the Fourth World Conference on Women would be an opportunity to take stock of the policies, programmes and measures devised for achieving women's advancement in the 50 years of the existence of the United

Nations and also to assess gains and failures. One representative suggested that the Conference should not be just a conference to reiterate commitments but to carry them forward. Some representatives suggested that the Fourth World Conference on Women should set standards for the first decade of the twenty-first century, against which the performance of the international community and national actions would be judged. Therefore, it was imperative to be successful in consensus-building for setting progressive, innovative and forward-looking standards for Governments and the international community, centred on the United Nations system.

(a) Preparatory activities at the national, regional and international levels

7. Most representatives expressed the view that the preparatory activities had been successful and noteworthy at all levels and particularly commended the work of non-governmental organizations. The preparations at the national level had been coordinated by National Committees composed of governmental and non-governmental institutions. Some representatives pointed out that the preparatory process, including the informal consultations held, had contributed to increasing awareness-raising at all levels and to enriching the Platform for Action. A few participants were of the view that the preparatory activities had given rise to intense communication and interaction among women as well as between all the sectors of society. In one country, consensus had been reached on actual and future challenges, as well as on actions to be taken. One representative highlighted the transparency and consultation of the preparatory process and said that a wealth of material had been obtained, on the basis of which the country position could be finalized.

8. In the context of the preparations for the Conference, one representative advised the Commission that efforts were being made with respect to the ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

9. Some representatives reported on national activities that addressed the critical areas of concern. One representative reported on efforts of the Government to assist women victims of war and violence and about plans to conduct a national seminar that would address affirmative action with respect to the status of women. Another representative provided information on a variety of programmes undertaken by the Government and non-governmental organizations to improve the status of women. One representative reported on workshops on women's participation and statistics and on the utilization of the mass media to promote public information. One representative informed the Commission that training activities have been developed, with special emphasis on the catalytic role of the Government and the need for the participation of all sectors.

10. Many representatives reported on the participation of their countries in the regional preparatory conferences. They expressed their support for the regional platforms of action. References were made to the High-level Regional Preparatory Meeting of the Economic Commission for Europe at Vienna and to the Conference on Equality and Democracy: Utopia and Challenge, organized by the Council of Europe at Strasbourg.

11. Some representatives reported on the subregional meetings organized in preparation for the regional preparatory meetings and the adoption of subregional platforms for action. One representative informed the Commission of the upcoming Caribbean subregional meeting to finalize preparations for the Conference.

12. In a joint statement, United Nations agencies advised the Commission about their activities in preparation for Beijing, emphasizing that acting in a coordinating way facilitated the realization of the Women in Development/gender mandates.

13. The Special Adviser to the Secretary-General for Public Policy spoke about the preparations for the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations and the special importance of women's contribution being reflected therein.

(b) Review and appraisal of the implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women

14. Many representatives stated that the principle of equality was embodied in their constitutions and in the Charter of the United Nations. Reference was made to the existing international legal instruments, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and to the various institutional, legal measures at the national level that were being taken to translate the principle of equality into reality. However, despite notable progress in the advancement of women in societies the world over, much remained to be done before the international community could claim that the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women had been implemented in full.

15. Although some representatives stated that the participation of women in decision-making bodies at the national level had increased, many representatives stressed that women were still far from reaching equal power and that more radical policy interventions and strong political will would be required to bring about immediate changes, including changes in the structure and cultures of institutions. Women's participation in decision-making was a prerequisite for democracy that should be practised at all levels, from grass-roots to top decision-making in both the private and public spheres. Some representatives expressed similar concerns regarding international institutions and decision-making, including the United Nations system.

16. Many representatives stated that despite increased participation of women in the labour force, women were still clustered in low-paid, low-skilled jobs and that discrimination against women in remuneration and promotion continued. A few representatives mentioned improvements in the areas of education and health. Many representatives referred to persistent discrimination against women and their lack of access to proper nutrition, clean drinking water, health, education, social support services and decent housing. Many representatives referred to women's insufficient access to productive resources such as land, capital and technology.

17. Some representatives stressed the negative impact of the continuing recession in many economies on women. Some representatives referred to the

increasing burden of debt and its adverse effects on women and overall national development programmes. It was stated that structural adjustment programmes had negatively affected the quality of life of women, particularly rural women. A few representatives mentioned the widening North-South gap and the extremely disadvantageous position of the least developed countries. One representative provided information on the main priorities for women in the least developed countries established at the meeting on women in development in the least developed countries, held in Niger in 1995.

18. Many representatives referred to education as a critical factor for the advancement of women, emphasizing the importance of education for girls.

19. Some representatives emphasized the importance of the family and the role of women as pillars of the family. One representative expressed concern that while achieving equality between men and women was essential, it should not deprive women of their femininity and their role as mothers. It was maintained that both men and women should be treated equally, with dignity as human beings and that the contribution of social reproduction to development should be duly recognized.

20. A few representatives stressed the importance of women's reproductive rights; they referred to their activities and the measures taken to improve women's reproductive health. Some representatives mentioned the increasing incidence of HIV/AIDS as a grave threat to women's health.

21. It was emphasized that sex-based discrimination was closely linked to culture and tradition. Reference was made to fundamentalist movements, religious extremism and ethnic fanaticism, which were said to adversely affect women's status in society. Another representative voiced concern about the "negative side of culture", which was often used to legitimize oppression of women in the family and society. It was suggested that that issue should be given due attention in the context of national and international programmes. One representative referred to cultures and the rights of indigenous people and the difficulty of integrating them.

22. Many representatives referred to the adverse effects of the lack of peace and security on women, particularly in situations of civil strife and armed conflict. In that context, the waste of resources due to increased military spending was emphasized. One representative referred to the holistic approach to security, taking into account basic developmental needs, as well as the need for political security, including respect for human rights. A few representatives stressed that women should unite more effectively and put a stop to ongoing wars, the production and development of weapons, arms trafficking and mindless destruction.

23. Many representatives commented on the violation of international legal, humanitarian and ethical standards, which adversely affected refugee and displaced women in situations of armed conflict. A few referred to rape being used as a tool of war. Some representatives referred to the worsening of socio-economic conditions and the feminization of poverty due to armed conflict and civil wars.

24. One representative reported on the meeting organized by the International Committee of the Red Cross to analyse the measures to be taken for ensuring the protection of women and children against the violation of international humanitarian laws.

25. Many representatives referred to the prevailing violence against women, in the family, society and in circumstances of war and armed conflict. They reported on means and measures to eradicate violence against women in all its forms and to provide assistance to the victims, and stressed the need for concerted international action in that respect. A few representatives raised the issue of new forms of violence emerging from terrorism.

26. Many representatives said that the human rights of women were insufficiently protected. Some stressed the importance of the principle of equality, enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, as the basis for international protection of women. Some representatives reported on efforts being made in their countries to reform national laws in compliance with international legal standards. It was stressed that the human rights of women should be respected in all spheres of life, including social and cultural rights, which constitute an integral part of universal human rights. One representative referred to the difficulties of transition from the customary to the modern legal framework. Although the advantage of the modern legal system was recognized, the necessity of protecting women in customary ways during the transition period was emphasized. Many representatives stressed the importance of legal literacy of women and the practical application of their rights.

27. Many representatives referred to the insufficiency of gender disaggregated data.

28. A non-governmental organization said that the current imbalance in women's access to various sports had been pointed out at a conference on women and sports, held in 1994, at which strategies to increase women's participation in sports had been adopted. The representative urged that the Platform for Action addressed barriers to women's equal participation in sports.

(c) Reports from regional conferences and other international conferences

29. The representatives of the regional commissions (the Economic Commission for Africa, the Economic Commission for Europe, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia) reported on the preparatory activities for the Fourth World Conference on Women, including regional conferences. All representatives commented on the wide participation in the regional conferences of intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, women's organizations and the United Nations system, including the regional commissions. They highlighted the process of consensus-building around regional critical areas of concern, leading to the adoption of regional platforms for action. The process was considered dynamic given the diversity and cultural pluralism among countries. Each representative acknowledged the contribution of various meetings at the subregional and national levels during the preparatory phase, including various youth meetings, artistic performances and fairs and other initiatives of civil society. All representatives stated

that specific follow-up activities were being planned for the implementation of regional plans of action.

30. One representative reported on the Regional Conference on Intra-Familial Violence which took place at Phnom Penh in December 1994.

31. References were made to the achievements of the international conferences in Mexico and Copenhagen.

(d) Draft rules of procedure

(e) Draft Platform for Action

32. Many representatives commended the draft Platform for Action as comprehensive and providing the basis for further discussion. Some representatives found it too extensive and detailed, as well as weak regarding content analysis and consistency in the critical areas of concern. Many representatives suggested that it should reflect reality and sensitivity to common global problems and in a balanced way embody regional diversity - without, however, duplicating the regional platforms for action.

33. Many representatives urged that the Platform for Action should reflect the many important and hard-won gains that were achieved in other United Nations world conferences - issues related to human rights; the commitment of the International Conference on Population and Development to the empowerment of women and women's health and reproductive rights; and the reaffirmation at the World Summit for Social Development that equality between men and women was crucial to the attainment of social and economic development. The key outcomes of those conferences should be used as the starting-point for the elaboration of further action on the Platform for Action.

34. Many representatives stressed that while the Platform for Action defined the mission and critical areas of concern as well as the global framework, the document lacked the punch and the vision that could only be provided with dramatic impact by a well-constructed declaration. Such a declaration should be brief, all-encompassing and with vision. One representative suggested that the declaration should be political and future-oriented, while another representative strongly urged that it should voice the commitment of Governments. Some representatives were of the view that the declaration should include the main proposals for action agreed upon in the Platform for Action.

35. Many representatives stressed that the Platform for Action should lead to the empowerment of women and embody actions that enabled women to participate fully in all spheres of life and to be involved in the decisions that affected them. The economic independence of women, as well as equality, provided the environment for the realization of women's full potential, individually and

collectively. The progress of humanity and the modernization of societies depended on the new role played by women. In that respect, greater prominence should be given to the need for the integration of gender impact analyses in policy-making and programme planning as a central approach to achieving equality. One representative suggested that the Platform for Action should be considered an agenda for equality.

36. Many representatives emphasized that the Platform for Action should focus on measures that could be realistically implemented in the immediate future. That would, of necessity, lead to an examination of institutional mechanisms both nationally and internationally, while avoiding proliferation and duplication of mechanisms. Some representatives reaffirmed the need to create national machineries, or reinforce existing ones by increasing the financial and human resources required. One representative stressed the importance of establishing appropriate mechanisms for promoting international cooperation. One representative said that the advancement of women was necessary for the organizational efficiency and effectiveness of the United Nations system.

37. Many representatives emphasized the need for more clarity in defining the various responsible actors, and called for integrated efforts among Governments, the international community and non-governmental organizations.

38. One representative addressed the issue of institutional arrangements, particularly in reference to the proposed merger of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women and the United Nations Development Fund for Women. It was suggested that the issue should be deliberated at length during the present session in the context of the overall restructuring of the United Nations system and the placement of women's issues within United Nations structures.

39. A few representatives referred to the mission statement, which should identify the relationship between the Platform for Action and the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women.

40. Some representatives referred to an imbalance among the different chapters of the Platform for Action and suggested that they should be elaborated further. One representative emphasized the importance of setting specific and globally quantifiable targets in all areas of concern.

41. Many representatives stated that the areas of decision-making, the human rights of women, women in the economy, violence against women, the burden of poverty, women's unpaid work, a life-cycle approach to health and education, and environmental issues should be given particular importance. Many representatives referred to particular issues that should be more strongly reflected in the Platform for Action, such as the impact of structural adjustment programmes, the situation of various groups of women including refugees, migrant women, indigenous women and women with disabilities. One representative suggested that special emphasis should be given to the problems faced by vulnerable women and include a definition of vulnerable women at the beginning of the document.

42. Many representatives referred to the concerns and needs of the girl child. Several representatives suggested a separate area of concern on that issue.

43. One representative suggested that the Platform for Action should address religious extremism as harmful to women's advancement and as specifically targeting women.

44. Many representatives referred to violence against women as one of the most critical issues that affected women, in both public and private life. It was stressed that the paragraphs concerning violence against women should comply with the texts of other recent United Nations documents, and in particular the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, adopted by the General Assembly.

45. Many representatives said that the feminization of poverty was taking place in both developed and developing countries and suggested that that section needed more extensive elaboration, specifying priority objectives.

(f) Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women

46. Many representatives emphasized that adequate financial resources and political commitments would be crucial for the implementation of the Platform for Action. In that respect, serious discussions should be held to estimate the cost and to mobilize resources. Many representatives considered that it was essential to look into the special needs of developing countries and the extra funding needed for implementing measures if the critical areas of concern identified in the Platform for Action were to be addressed effectively. A few representatives stated that donor countries had a specific role to play in implementing the decisions of the Conference with respect to development cooperation.

47. As lack of access to higher education was cited as one of the main reasons for the low representation of women in decision-making at all levels, one representative proposed the creation of a "fund for women in university" to lend money to qualified women to achieve higher education.

48. Many representatives emphasized the importance of women's concerns being fully integrated into all United Nations activities and structures. In that respect, the process of United Nations restructuring should be kept open and transparent. The serious underrepresentation of women in the Secretariat, especially at the senior level, should be of concern to Governments.

49. A few representatives described specific activities and seminars that were being planned as a follow-up to the Conference. Among them were the creation of a centre for women and the sponsoring of an extraordinary meeting of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in 1995. Some representatives said they were preparing national programmes for action and had set up sectoral committees with governmental and non-governmental organizations to ensure effective follow-up to the Conference.

50. A few representatives referred to the interest of their Governments in setting up an international centre for non-governmental organizations from Central and Eastern European countries.

51. One representative raised the question of whether the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was sufficiently effective to safeguard individual women against gender discrimination and called for the endorsement of the proposal for an optional protocol, as agreed upon at the European regional preparatory meeting. Another representative considered it important that all countries ratify the Convention without reservations, as well as all the other international instruments for the protection of human rights.

52. United Nations agencies emphasized the importance of inter-agency cooperation in the implementation of the declarations and programmes of action adopted at United Nations world conferences. Therefore, in order to ensure complementarity and synergy in the implementation of the Platform for Action, an inter-agency mechanism should be established.

53. United Nations agencies reiterated their commitment to contribute to the implementation of the Platform for Action in accordance with their respective mandates. Many agencies referred to specific objectives and actions in which they had a comparative advantage to assist with future follow-up activities. Some of the noteworthy proposals included: analytical work on policy and strategic issues concerning women's participation in the economy, especially through increased access to resources so as to benefit from mainstream industrial development processes and the labour market in general; further strengthening databases, including the development of methods and statistics for further gender analysis and conducting and disseminating policy-oriented gender research.

54. In order to highlight the key role of education for the advancement of girls and women, a proposal was made to celebrate international literacy day at Beijing. The role of the mass communication media in promoting gender equality and women's active participation in development was stressed.

55. Many representatives of various non-governmental organizations addressed the issues regarding the preparations for the Fourth World Conference on Women and made their comments on the Platform for Action.